

The Introduction of Foreign Thought and Literature

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안녕하십니까? 여러분 만나서 반갑습니다. I'm very glad to have an opportunity to speak to you all. Three years ago I visited 원광대학교 (Wonkwang University) with President Itō of Bukkyo University. The large campus and fine atmosphere of 원광대학교 impressed me very much.

Today I'm going to speak on the subject of 'The Introduction of Foreign Thought and Literature'. My major field of study is English literature. The introduction of foreign thought and literature has been of much benefit both to English literature and to Japanese literature. I'll talk about how they've introduced alien thought and literature into their literary works.

English literature grew out of the fusion of the fortitudinous Anglo-Saxons and the Celts who were full of fancy and delicate sentiment. English literature is characterized by its sense of fact, its sense of morality, its sense of humor, and its romanticism and symbolism.

Now I'll turn to today's subject; first, let's read part of the third soliloquy of Hamlet.

To be, or not to be, that is the question,
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a seas of troubles,
And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep —
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wish'd, To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream, ay there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
Must give us pause — there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life:

As pointed out by scholars, in the lines 'To die, to sleep—/ No more, and by a sleep to say we end / The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation / Devoutly to be wish'd', Shakespeare follows Montaigne's *Essays*, translated by John Florio, which includes a summary of the Greek philosopher Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. If we compare these lines of *Hamlet* with Florio's English translation, it is clear that Shakespeare follows Montaigne, judging from the word 'consummation' and other expressions. In the original *Apology*, the matter for Socrates' first consideration is 'to be right or to be wrong', not 'to live or to die'; he, being innocent, cherishes a hope for his death. In the case of Montaigne, Socrates does not fear death, as he does not know what will happen after death. On the other hand, Hamlet does fear death, as he does not know what will happen after death. He repeats 'To die, to sleep' and expresses his hesitating spirit. We can say Shakespeare introduced the thought of Plato's Socrates into his drama through Florio's translation of Montaigne, adapting the thought to Hamlet's extreme existential situation facing death, and expressed vividly the ultimate stage of human life and death.

Next, let's take a glance at several lines of *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot.

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To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning

O Lord Thou pluckest me out

O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

This passage is the end of Part III, 'Fire Sermon'. As Eliot's original notes mention, these lines are taken from St. Augustine's *Confessions* and from the Buddha's *Fire Sermon*. The collocation of the two shows that the way out of the burning fire of sensual appetite lies in asceticism. And the transcendence from the flesh to the spirit is performed by the hands of the Saviour. One should burn the burning appetite in the burning fire of purification. According to a generally accepted opinion, the diminution of the four words 'Burning burning burning burning' to the final single word 'burning' suggests a going down of the fire by the deepening of prayer together with a possibility of purification. But in my view, the two lines from Augustine beginning with 'O Lord' imply a rather feeble self-contempt in the brisk fire of appetite and an almost hopeless prayer to the Lord. The last 'burning' sounds very low — a murmur, 'still burning'. If this interpretation is correct, we can read the poet's almost desperate disgust at sensual desires, as well as his skill in psychological application, in the introduction of the Buddha's *Fire Sermon*. I cannot lay out in detail here the grounds of my interpretation. One ground is Eliot's words quoted in the facsimile of the original drafts of *The Waste Land*. He says concerning this poem, 'To me it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmical grumbling'. I want to call attention to the words 'grouse' and 'grumbling'.

Now I'll talk a little about Kaneko Mitsuharu. He is highly estimated as a poet who wrote poems against the last War. I like his symbolic nihilistic poems of wartime. He wrote, at the last moment of the War, songs of moths, one of which begins in this way—「月はない。だが月の明るさにみちてゐた。」(달은 없다. 그러나 달빛이 왔다.) When the War came to an end, Kaneko intended to turn in a different direction—to inquiry into the real nature of his self and mankind. The first collection of his poems published after the War is 『人間の悲劇』 (*The Tragedy of Man*, 인간의 비극). The central chapter of this collection is No. 3 'About

the Ghosts' which begins with 'Song of the Ghosts'. Out of this chapter, let's take up here 「真空にあくがれる歌」 (*Song of Yearning for Vacuum*, 진공을 동경 하는 노래).

[Here quotation of the whole poem is omitted]

In this poem too ghosts appear. What are the ghosts? Ideas and customs, ideals and justice are regarded as ghosts, and the history of mankind is summarized as the history of the ghosts. However, these are the views of Max Stirner, German philosopher of individualistic anarchism. Kaneko from his youth was attracted by the views of Stirner. In the collection *The Tragedy of Man* the poet's interpretation of the ghosts is done by his old familiar ghost named Stirner. What could he have done, who personally felt it's too late to do anything? His poems published after *The Tragedy of Man* plainly show he was declining more and more with his increasing age, sticking to his ism of non-thought.

Well, let me add a few words in conclusion. Excellent literary men have often been influenced by things far distant in time and space. John Keats, an apostle of beauty who died young, spectacularly assimilated foreign cultural inheritances, especially that of old Greece. Though different in language and history we ought to absorb one another and affect one another. The German poet Goethe says, 'Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eignen.' (He who does not know foreign languages does not understand his own language at all.) In the study of literature it's essential, I think, to maintain an attitude of questioning and discovery, and carry on the work as a plain craftsman, with a keen sensibility to the beautiful and a sensitive intellectual antenna reaching out far; especially in the study of foreign literature, it's important to pay close attention not only to points of similarity but to those of difference between each other. 감사합니다.

—Some parts omitted—

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